

How Myrna Melgar Gamed San Francisco's Rank Choice Voting in 2020

As a reminder to D-7 voters, my detailed [analysis](#) of the election results for the November 3, 2020 general election document shows how Myrna Melgar managed to sneak through the back door to enter the “*House of Supervisors*” in Board Chambers at City Hall, via ranked choice voting by the skin of her teeth and the hair on her chinny chin chin.

Table 1 of the election results analysis shows:

- 6,448 — fully 12.9% — registered D-7 voters sat out the election and didn't vote at all. Melgar obviously benefitted from the low voter turnout.
- Of the 43,426 ballots cast in D-7, another 3,970 voters chose not to vote for any of the seven candidates running for District Supervisor, bringing the total of D-7 voters uninterested in choosing their District Supervisor to 10,418 — fully 20.9% of D-7's 49,874 registered voters in November 2020.
- At the start of ranked choice voting Round 1, only 39,332 of the 43,426 ballots cast in 2020 survived. But at the end when Round 1 was tabulated, another 4,401 ballots were eliminated for various ballot errors. That left the D-7 election to be decided by only 34,931 ballots — just 70% of D-7's 49,874 registered voters. Again, between apathetic voter turnout and ballot errors, Melgar benefitted immensely.

Ballot errors include “*undervotes*” — defined by the San Francisco Department of Elections as when a voter chooses not to make *all* of the allowed maximum number of marks for any single race — and “*overvotes*,” when a voter makes *more* marks than allowed for any given candidate or ballot measure.

Table 2 of the election results analysis shows:

- When Round 1 started with 39,332 ballots, Melgar found herself in third place, with just 7,881 — 20% — of the votes cast. She trailed the leader, candidate Joel Engardio, by 1,391 votes. Candidate Vilaska Nguyen had secured second place ahead of Melgar.
- Of note, out of the seven candidates vying for the seat, Stephen Martin-Pinto placed fifth in Round 1. At the end of Round 6, of the 4,599 first ballots Martin-Pinto had received in Round 1, just 1,024 of his initial votes — only 22.3% of his first-round votes — were transferred to Melgar when he was finally eliminated in Round 5.
- Table 2 also shows that by the end of Round 6 calculations, there were a total of 10,680 votes transferred from other candidates to Myrna, bringing Melgar's winning total to 18,561 of the final 34,931 ballots that survived through the end of Round 6. Of the 10,680 votes transferred to Melgar, fully 6,909 — nearly two-thirds at 64.7% of the 10,680 — had come from votes transferred from votes initially cast for Vilaska Ngyen.

Medgar's' initial 7,881 first-place votes in Round 1 ended up representing 42.5% of her final vote total, with ballots transferred to her accounting for 57.5% of her election victory. She wouldn't have survived by the skin of her teeth were it not for those transferred votes.

- Although Melgar ended up snagging 53.1% of the valid 34,931 valid ballots by the conclusion of Round 6, her 18,561 winning votes represented just 37.2% of D-7's 49,874 registered voters. That's hardly a ringing seal of approval by registered voters.

By way of comparison to the November 6, 2012 election that had ushered Melgar's predecessor, Norman Yee into City Hall, Table 3 of the election results analysis reveals:

- Only 35,351 —74.9% — of D-7's then 47,196 registered voters cast ballots in the 2012 general election in November 2012. Fully 25.1% of registered voters sat out the 2012 election, compared to 12.9% of registered voters who sat out of the 2020 general election.

- The 15,630 registered voters who sat out of voting at all in 2012, plus the voters who cast ballots but chose not to vote for any of the D-7 candidates for Supervisor, represented fully 33.1% of registered voters who apparently didn't care who became their Supervisor at City Hall. That compared to the 10,418 of D-7 voters in November 2020 — 20.9% — who didn't care about voting for their representative at City Hall.
- It's clear candidates for Supervisor in D-7 face an uphill battle combatting voter apathy in District 7.

Importantly, Table 4 of the election results analysis contains some more granular data:

- Supervisor Yee had slinked into office earning just 132 more votes than his closet, and second-place challenger, F.X. Crowley in 2012. Yee won by the slimmest 0.5% margin over Crowley, earning 50.3% to 48.7%.
- By contrast, Melgar crept into office with a 6.2% margin over Engardio, winning by just 2,181 more votes. Melgar remained in second place right up through the end of Round #5. Melgar clawed back her way in, only by the grace of the ranked choice votes transferred to her in Round #6.
- Had all of Martin-Pinto's plus Emily Murase's combined 2,985 votes shown in Table 2 been transferred to Joel Engardio rather than transferred to Melgar, she would *not* have squeaked through ranked choice voting to become D-7's Supervisor. Melgar's disastrous record on the issues described above might have been avoided for D7 residents.

Finally, Table 4 illustrates the grave danger facing D-7 voters in the November 2024 election. There were nine candidates vying for election in 2012 when Norman Yee sought the D-7 seat. In 2020, the candidate pool shrank to a total of seven candidates when Melgar was handed the job.

But in 2024, there are only four candidates vying to become D-7's Supervisor. Meaning, there is much less room to make voting mistakes with ranked choice voting.